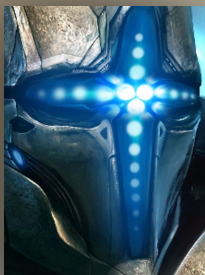




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# Last Crusade



sci-fi

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63 2 8

## Chapter 1 by Phantim

War has ravaged the earth for years now. Those who could, have fled - desperate to find new worlds. But for most of us the Earth is still the only place we have. It's hard to say when the war really started, some say it was in the days when the ink on the first copy of the Bible was still drying. Some say it was when the planes crashed into the towers. But we all know what started the war: Religion.

East met west in the most violent way. Christians and Muslims - they had been perennial enemies since the days of Jacob - then the crusades. Yes, the crusades... that was what we call the war now. It had spread far beyond that now, no nation was left un-touched - no religion or philosophy had gone unscathed. Violent acts large and small have been unleashed, from beheadings in the streets to nuclear detonations. We have one chance left to stop this - our last desperate chance to bring the world back from the brink. The /Crusader Initiative/...

## Chapter 2 by Cameron scott



+++

2255: December 3rd

New Chicago, Lionheart co-op ho

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"Gentlemen, thank you to  
of things"

and get right to the heart

The gray-haired, tired man surveyed his solemn audience. I sat near the back, over to the side. Glancing around, the Lionheart officials looked like they had risen from the dead. Some still wore tattered suits from when suits were still being made, in place of war rations and ammunition. Others, more disillusioned, simply wore street clothes, which did not seem to be in much better condition. Still others, like me, had our armor on like we were going to go fight right outside in a minute.

Some times it felt like I had spent more time on the inside of it than outside.

Constable Grey continued his speech at the front of the somber audience room. A bright screen glared above him, casting a harsh definition on the already harsh lines of my armor.

"Earth is dying," he continued, "and there's no measure of bullets or bombs that can bring it back to life. We all know that, we've known that for some time now. It is time of face the facts. "We've all seen witches burn and church spires fall. Every day, civilization crawls towards extinction. We are already facing another dark age, now is the time to end this holocaust."

With this, the entire assembly sat forward, except me. I knew what was coming.

"Gentlemen, the luxury of self protection no longer exists. The Crusader Initiative will not save the Lionheart. When this operation comes into play, all world organizations will dissolve, and the world will devolve into anarchy.

"But, there *is* hope. When the operation completes, all weapons of mass destruction will become obsolete. The Firewall war will shut down instantly, and the troops will be recalled."

Silence. Above the Constable, the screen began to display a flight plan, between the earth and the sun.

"I know that some of you are already familiar with the procedure, but now, on the eve of Ragnarok, let us not go blind into the darkness. You all deserve to know what is happening. "Eight months ago, LSA launched a missile. This was not an ICBM, though. The Rapture Device

is now almost ready for launch, and with the sun. When it does, the SD will be launched, initiating a giant solar flare.

"Now, I know what some of you are thinking. The sun is not an international structure, and we would be breaking a major treaty. But, if we don't do this, we're all going to die. I'm not attacking it."

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Then they understood. Invite the armies to their gates, then break down their walls. When the Rapture Device detonates and causes a sun flare, the Earth will be defenseless when the SunShield fails, and the magnetic surge would destroy all technology. The Dark ages would begin anew, full and terrible.

"They will call us villains. They will call us terrorists. In the future, we will be the Nazis. None of that matters if mankind falters, though."

Then, a little way away, a man stood up. "That is a sacrifice I am willing to make."

Another one stood up. "That is a sacrifice I too am willing to make."

The room erupted in calls of encouragement and support. Weak men had abandoned positions of power long ago.

"Thank you all. Now, I would like all of you to go prepare. The apocalypse can start without you."

After they had left, Grey came to me.

"Are you ready?"

### Chapter 3 by PimpFreud



++++

2255, December 4th

Location Unknown.

The chanting reverberated across the facility, seeping into the towering walls. "Rise! Rise! Nephilim!" the shrouded figures echoed in unison. The group stood in a circle, observing a queer device on the floor. It purred and beeped mechanically, shooting small lasers of blue, red and purple across their faces.

The chanting stopped and was replaced with what sounded like giant gears turning below. "The Nephilim will rise and consume all that is unworthy of this sacred world. Today we become martyrs of the holy cause, the one with conviction. His golden mask reflecting speckles of laser light." "Children of God!" he

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yelled, energizing the group with further passion. "Rise! Rise! Nephilim!" They continued, with extra fervor.

Around them, millions of cylindrical vats began to rise from the floor with a hiss. Steam whooshed upwards as each one came to a stop. The cavernous room filled with a green light, from the combined illuminance of the vats. The group fell into a hush as each member began to observe the immensity of the dome they were standing under. The surface of which was covered in mind-numbingly complex geometric patterns, all leading towards the center.

"Behold! The chamber of the ancients! The resting place of the great machines!" the golden masked leader shouted. The murky figures within the containers began to twitch. Then with a sudden thump, one of them slammed its silver, biomechanical hand against the thick glass. A face appeared through the green bog and its eyes began to shine a mixture of purple, red and blue. It smiled, and the hooded men and women began to kneel.

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